

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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IS HE POPENJOY ?

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

CHAPTER XLII. "NOT GO!"

THE dean had a great deal to think of as he walked home a little too late for his daughter's usual dinner hour. What should he tell her—and what should he do as to communicating, or not communicating, tidings of the day's work to Lord George? Of course everybody must know what had been done sooner or later. He would have had no objection to that—providing the truth could be told accurately—except as to the mention of his daughter's name in the same sentence with that abominable word. But the word would surely be known, and the facts would not be told with accuracy unless he told them himself. His only, but his fully sufficient defence was in the word. But who would know the tone? Who would understand the look of the man's eye and the smile on his mouth? Who could be made to conceive, as the dean himself had conceived, the aggravated injury of the premeditated slander? He would certainly write and tell Lord George everything. But to his daughter he thought that he would tell as little as possible. Might God in his mercy save her ears, her sacred feelings, her pure heart from the wound of that word! He felt that she was dearer to him than ever she had been—that he would give up deanery and everything if he could save her by doing so. But he felt that if she were to be sacrificed in the contest, he would give up deanery and everything in avenging her.

But something must be told to her. He at any rate must remain in town, and it

would be very desirable that she should stay with him. If she went alone she would at once be taken to Cross Hall; and he could understand that the recent occurrence would not add to the serenity of her life there. The name that had been applied to her, together with the late folly of which her husband had been guilty, would give those Manor Cross dragons—as the dean was apt in his own thoughts to call the Ladies Germain—a tremendous hold over her. And should she be once at Cross Hall he would hardly be able to get her back to the Deanery.

He hurried up to dress as soon as he reached the house, with a word of apology as to being late, and then found her in the drawing-room. "Papa," she said, "I do like Mrs. Montacute Jones."

"So do I, my dear, because she is good-humoured."

"But she is so good-natured also! She has been here again to-day, and wants me and George to go down to Scotland in August. I should so like it."

"What will George say?"

"Of course he won't go; and of course I shan't. But that doesn't make it the less good-natured. She wishes all her set to think that what happened the other night doesn't mean anything."

"I'm afraid he won't consent."

"I know he won't. He wouldn't know what to do with himself. He hates a house full of people. And now tell me what the marquis said." But dinner was announced, and the dean was not forced to answer this question immediately.

"Now, papa," she said again, as soon as the coffee was brought and the servant was gone, "do tell me what my most noble brother-in-law wanted to say to you?"

That he certainly would not tell. "Your brother-in-law, my dear, behaved about as badly as a man could behave."

"Oh dear! I am so sorry!"

"We have to be sorry, both of us. And your husband will be sorry." He was so serious that she hardly knew how to speak to him. "I cannot tell you everything; but he insulted me, and I was forced to strike him."

"Strike him! Oh, papa!"

"Bear with me, Mary. In all things I think well of you, and do you try to think well of me."

"Dear papa! I will. I do. I always did."

"Anything he might have said of myself I could have borne. He could have applied no epithet to me which, I think, could even have ruffled me. But he spoke evil of you." While he was sitting there he made up his mind that he would tell her as much as that, though he had before almost resolved that he would not speak to her of herself. But she must hear something of the truth, and better that she should hear it from him than from other lips. She turned very pale, but did not immediately make any reply. "Then I was full of wrath," he continued. "I did not even attempt to control myself; but I took him by the throat and flung him violently to the ground. He fell upon the grate, and it may be that he has been hurt. Had the fall killed him he would have deserved it. He had courage to wound a father in his tenderest part, only because that father was a clergyman. His belief in a black coat will, I think, be a little weakened by what occurred to-day."

"What will be done?" she asked, whispering.

"Heaven only knows. But I can't go out of town to-morrow. I shall write to George to-night and tell him everything that has occurred, and shall beg that you may be allowed to stay with me for the few days that will be necessary."

"Of course I will not leave you."

"It is not that. But I do not want you to go to Cross Hall quite at present. If you went without me they would not let you come to the Deanery. Of course there will be a great commotion at Cross Hall. Of course they will condemn me. Many will condemn me, as it will be impossible to make the world believe the exact truth."

"I will never condemn you," she said. Then she came over and threw herself on her knees at his feet, and embraced him.

"But, papa, what did the man say of me?"

"Not what he believed; but what he thought would give me the greatest anguish. Never mind. Do not ask any more questions. You also had better write to your husband, and you can tell him fully all that I have told you. If you will write to-night I will do so also, and I will take care that they shall have our letters to-morrow afternoon. We must send a message to say that we shall not be at the Deanery to-morrow." The two letters to Lord George were both written that night, and were both very long. They told the same story, though in a different tone. The dean was by no means apologetic, but was very full and very true. When he came to the odious word he could not write it, but he made it very clear without writing. Would not the husband feel as he, the father, had felt in regard to his young wife, the sweet pure girl of whose love and possession he ought to be so proud? How would any brother be forgiven who had assailed such a treasure as this; much less such a brother as this marquis? Perhaps Lord George might think it right to come up. The dean would of course ask at the hotel on the following day, and would go to the police-office. He believed, he said, that no permanent injury had been done. Then came, perhaps, the pith of his letter. He trusted that Lord George would agree with him, in thinking that Mary had better remain with him in town during the two or three days of his necessarily prolonged sojourn. This was put in the form of a request; but was put in a manner intended to show that the request if not granted would be enforced. The dean was fully determined that Mary should not at once go down to Cross Hall.

Her letter was supplicatory, spasmodic, full of sorrow, and full of love. She was quite sure that her dear papa would have done nothing that he ought not to have done; but yet she was very sorry for the marquis, because of his mother and sisters, and because of her dear, dear George. Could he not run up to them and hear all about it from papa? If the marquis had said ill-natured things of her it was very cruel, because nobody loved her husband better than she loved her dear, dear George—and so on. The letters were then sent under cover to the housekeeper at the Deanery, with orders to send them on by private messenger to Cross Hall.

On the following day the dean went to Scumberg's, but could not learn much there. The marquis had been very bad, and had had one and another doctor with him almost continually; but Mrs. Walker could not take upon herself to say that "it was dangerous." She thought it was "in'ard." Mrs. Walkers always do think that it is "in'ard" when there is nothing palpable outward. At any rate his lordship had not been out of bed, and had taken nothing but tapioca and brandy. There was very little more than this to be learned at the police-office. The case might be serious, but the superintendent hoped otherwise. The superintendent did not think that the dean should go down quite to-morrow. The morrow was Friday; but he suggested Saturday as possible, Monday as almost certain. It may be as well to say here that the dean did not call at the police-office again, and heard nothing further from the officers of the law respecting the occurrence at Scumberg's. On the Friday he called again at Scumberg's, and the marquis was still in bed. His "in'ards" had not ceased to be matter of anxiety to Mrs. Walker; but the surgeon, whom the dean now saw, declared that the muscles of the nobleman's back were more deserving of sympathy. The surgeon, with a gravity that almost indicated offence, expressed his opinion that the marquis's back had received an injury which—which might be—very injurious.

Lord George, when he received the letters, was thrown into a state of mind that almost distracted him. During the last week or two the animosity felt at Cross Hall against the marquis had been greatly weakened. A feeling had come upon the family that, after all, Popenjoy was Popenjoy; and that, although the natal circumstances of such a Popenjoy were doubtless unfortunate for the family generally, still, as an injury had been done to the marquis by the suspicion, those circumstances ought now to be in a measure forgiven. The marquis was the head of the family, and a family will forgive much to its head when that head is a marquis. As we know, the dowager had been in his favour from the first, Lord George had lately given way, and had undergone a certain amount of reconciliation with his brother. Lady Amelia had seceded to her mother, as had also Mrs. Toff, the old housekeeper. Lady Susanna was wavering, having had her

mind biased by the objectionable conduct of the dean and his daughter. Lady Sarah was more stanch. Lady Sarah had never yet given way; she never did give way; and, in her very heart, she was the best friend that Mary had among the ladies of the family. But, when her brother gave up the contest, she felt that further immediate action was impossible. Things were in this state at Cross Hall when Lord George received the two letters. He did not wish to think well of the dean just at present, and was horrified at the idea of a clergyman knocking a marquis into a fireplace. But the word indicated was very plain, and that word had been applied to his own wife. Or, perhaps, no such word had really been used. Perhaps the dean had craftily saved himself from an absolute lie, and in his attempt to defend the violence of his conduct had brought an accusation against the marquis, which was, in its essence, untrue. Lord George was quite alive to the duty of defending his wife; but in doing so he was no longer anxious to maintain affectionate terms with his wife's father. She had been very foolish. All the world had admitted as much. He had seen it with his own eyes at that wretched ball. She had suffered her name to be joined with that of a stranger in a manner derogatory to her husband's honour. It was hardly surprising that his brother should have spoken of her conduct in disparaging terms; but he did not believe that his brother had used that special term. Personal violence, blows and struggling, and that on the part of a dean of the Church of England; and violence such as this seemed to have been, violence that might have killed the man attacked, seemed to him to be in any case unpardonable. He certainly could not live on terms of friendship with the dean immediately after such a deed. His wife must be taken away and secluded, and purified by a long course of Germain asceticism.

But what must he do now at once? He felt that it was his duty to hurry up to London, but he could not bring himself to live in the same house with the dean. His wife must be taken away from her father. However bad may have been the language used by the marquis, however indefensible, he could not allow himself even to seem to keep up affectionate relations with the man who had half slaughtered his brother. He too thought of what the world would say, he too felt

that such an affair, after having become known to the police, would be soon known to everyone else. But what must he do at once? He had not as yet made up his mind as to this, when he took his place at the Brotherton Railway Station on the morning after he had received the letters.

But on reaching the station in London, he had so far made up his mind as to have his portmanteau taken to the hotel close at hand, and then to go to Munster Court. He had hoped to find his wife alone; but on his arrival the dean was there also. "Oh, George," she said, "I am so glad you have come; where are your things?" He explained that he had no things, that he had come up only for a short time, and had left his luggage at the station. "But you will stay here to-night?" asked Mary, in despair.

Lord George hesitated, and the dean at once saw how it was. "You will not go back to Brotherton to-day," he said. Now, at this moment the dean had to settle in his mind the great question, whether it would be best for his girl that she should be separated from her husband or from her father. In giving him his due, it must be acknowledged that he considered only what might in truth be best for her. If she were now taken away from him there would be no prospect of recovery. After all that had passed, after Lord George's submission to his brother, the dean was sure that he would be held in abhorrence by the whole Germain family. Mary would be secluded and trodden on, and reduced to pale submission by all the dragons, till her life would be miserable. Lord George himself would be prone enough to domineer in such circumstances. And then that ill word which had been spoken, and which could only be effectually burned out of the thoughts of people by a front to the world at the same time innocent and bold, would stick to her for ever if she were carried away into obscurity.

The dean knew as well as others how great is the evil of a separation, and how specially detrimental such a step would be to a young wife. Than a permanent separation, anything would be better; better even that she should be secluded and maligned, and even, for awhile, trodden under foot. Were such separation to take place, his girl would have been altogether sacrificed, and her life's happiness brought to shipwreck. But then a permanent separation was not probable.

She had done nothing wrong. The husband and wife did, in truth, love each other dearly. The marquis would be soon gone, and then Lord George would return to his old habits of thought and his old allegiance. Upon the whole, the dean thought it best that his present influence should be used in taking his daughter to the Deanery.

"I should like to return quite early to-morrow," said Lord George, very gravely, "unless my brother's condition should make it impossible."

"I trust you won't find your brother much the worse for what has happened," said the dean.

"But you will sleep here to-night," repeated Mary.

"I will come for you the first thing in the morning," said Lord George, in the same funereal voice.

"But why; why?"

"I shall probably have to be a good deal with my brother during the afternoon. But I will be here again in the afternoon. You can be at home at five, and you can get your things ready for going to-morrow."

"Won't you dine here?"

"I think not."

Then there was silence for a minute. Mary was completely astounded. Lord George wished to say nothing further in the presence of his father-in-law. The dean was thinking how he would begin to use his influence. "I trust you will not take Mary away to-morrow."

"Oh; certainly."

"I trust not. I must ask you to hear me say a few words about this."

"I must insist on her coming with me to-morrow, even though I should have to return to London myself afterwards."

"Mary," said her father, "leave us for a moment." Then Mary retired, with a very saddened air. "Do you understand, George, what it was that your brother said to me?"

"I suppose so," he answered, hoarsely.

"Then, no doubt, I may take it for granted that you approve of the violence of my resentment? To me as a clergyman, and as a man past middle life, the position was very trying. But had I been an archbishop, tottering on the grave with years, I must have endeavoured to do the same." This he said with great energy. "Tell me, George, that you think that I was right."

But George had not heard the word,

had not seen the man's face. And then, though he would have gone to a desert island with his wife, had such exile been necessary for her protection, he did believe that she had misconducted herself. Had he not seen her whirling round the room with that man, after she had been warned against him? "It cannot be right to murder a man," he said at last.

"You do not thank me then for vindicating your honour and your wife's innocence?"

"I do not think that was the way. The way is to take her home."

"Yes; to her old home, to the Deanery, for awhile; so that the world, which will no doubt hear the malignant epithet applied to her by your wicked brother, may know that both her husband and her father support her. You had promised to come to the Deanery."

"We cannot do that now."

"Do you mean that after what has passed you will take your brother's part?"

"I will take my wife to Cross Hall," he said, leaving the room and following Mary up to her chamber.

"What am I to do, papa?" she said, when she came down about half-an-hour afterwards. Lord George had then started for Scumberg's, saying that he would come to Munster Court again before dinner, but telling her plainly that he would not sit down to dine with her father. "He has determined to quarrel with you."

"It will only be for a time, dearest."

"But what shall I do?"

Now came the peril of the answer. He was sure, almost sure, that she would in this emergency rely rather upon him than on her husband, if he were firm; but, should he be firm as against the husband, how great would be his responsibility! "I think, my dear," he said at last, "that you shall go with me to Brotherton."

"But he will not let me."

"I think that you should insist on his promise."

"Don't make us quarrel, papa."

"Certainly not. Anything would be better than a permanent quarrel. But, after what has been said, after the foul lies that have been told, I think that you should assert your purpose of staying for awhile with your father. Were you now to go to Cross Hall there would be no limit to their tyranny." He left her without a word more, and calling at Scumberg's Hotel was told that the marquis could not move.

At that moment Lord George was with his brother, and the marquis could talk though he could not move. "A precious family you've married into, George," he said, almost as soon as his brother was in the room. Then he gave his own version of the affair, leaving his brother in doubt as to the exact language that had been used. "He ought to have been a coal-heaver instead of a clergyman," said the marquis.

"Of course he would be angry," said Lord George.

"Nothing astonishes me so much," said the marquis, "as the way in which you fellows here think you may say whatever comes into your head about my wife, because she is an Italian, and you seem to be quite surprised if I object; yet you rage like wild beasts if the compliment is returned. Why am I to think better of your wife than you of mine?"

"I said nothing against your wife, Brotherton."

"By —, I think you have said a great deal, and with much less reason than I have. What did you do yourself, when you found her struggling in that fellow's arms at the old woman's party?" Some good-natured friend had told the marquis the whole story of the Kappa-kappa. "You can't be deaf to what all the world is saying of her." This was wormwood to the wretched husband, and yet he could not answer with angry, self-reliant indignation, while his brother was lying almost motionless before him.

Lord George found that he could do nothing at Scumberg's Hotel. He was assured that his brother was not in danger, and that the chief injury done was to the muscles of his back, which, bruised and lacerated as they were, would gradually recover such elasticity as they had ever possessed. But other words were said and other hints expressed, all of which tended to increase his animosity against the dean, and almost to engender anger against his wife. To himself, personally, except in regard to his wife, his brother had not been ungracious. The marquis intended to return to Italy as soon as he could. He hated England and everything in it. Manor Cross would very soon be at Lord George's disposal, "though I do hope," said the marquis, "that the lady who has condescended to make me her brother-in-law, will never reign paramount there." By degrees there crept on Lord George's mind a feeling that his

brother looked to a permanent separation—something like a repudiation. Over and over again he spoke of Mary as though she had disgraced herself utterly; and when Lord George defended his wife, the lord only smiled and sneered.

The effect upon Lord George was to make him very imperious as he walked back to Munster Court. He could not repudiate his wife, but he would take her away with a very high hand. Crossing the Green Park, at the back of Arlington Street, whom should he meet but Mrs. Houghton with her cousin Jack. He raised his hat, but could not stop a moment. Mrs. Houghton made an attempt to arrest him, but he escaped without a word and went on very quickly. His wife had behaved generously about Mrs. Houghton. The sight of the woman brought that truth to his mind. He was aware of that. But no generosity on the part of the wife, no love, no temper, no virtue, no piety can be accepted by Cæsar as weighing a grain in counterpoise against even suspicion.

He found his wife and asked her whether her things were being packed. "I cannot go to-morrow," she said.

"Not go?"

"No, George—not to Cross Hall. I will go to the Deanery. You promised to go to the Deanery."

"I will not go to the Deanery. I will go to Cross Hall." There was an hour of it, but during the entire hour, the young wife persisted obstinately that she would not be taken to Cross Hall. "She had," she said, "been very badly treated by her husband's family." "Not by me," shouted the husband. She went on to say that nothing could now really put her right but the joint love of her father and her husband. Were she at Cross Hall her father could do nothing for her. She would not go to Cross Hall. Nothing short of policemen should take her to Cross Hall to-morrow.

CHAPTER XLIII. REAL LOVE.

"He is looking awfully cut up," Mrs. Houghton said to her cousin.

"He is one of the most infernal fools that ever I came across in my life," said Jack.

"I don't see that he is a fool at all—any more than all men are fools. Not one among you is ever able to keep his little troubles to himself. You are not a bit wiser than the rest of them yourself."

"I haven't got any troubles—of that sort."

"You haven't a wife—but you'll be forced into having one before long. And when you like another man's wife you can't keep all the world from knowing it."

"All the world may know everything that has taken place between me and Lady George," said Jack. "Of course I like her."

"I should say, rather."

"And so do you."

"No, I don't, sir. I don't like her at all. She is a foolish, meaningless little creature, with nothing to recommend her but a pretty colour. And she has cut me, because her husband will come and pour out his sorrow into my ears. For his sake I used to be good to her."

"I think she is the sweetest human being I ever came across in my life," said Jack, enthusiastically.

"Everybody in London knows that you think so—and that you have told her your thoughts."

"Nobody in London knows anything of the kind. I never said a word to her that her husband mightn't have heard."

"Jack!"

"I never did."

"I wonder you are not ashamed to confess such simplicity, even to me."

"I am not a bit ashamed of that, though I am ashamed of having in some sort contributed to do her an injury. Of course I love her."

"Rather, as I said before."

"Of course you intended that I should."

"I intended that you should amuse yourself. As long as you are good to me, I shall be good to you."

"My dear Adelaide, nobody can be so grateful as I am. But in this matter the thing hasn't gone quite as you intended. You say that she is meaningless."

"Vapid, flabby, childish, and innocent as a baby."

"Innocent I am sure she is. Vapid and flabby she certainly is not. She is full of fun, and is quite as witty as a woman should be."

"You always liked fools, Jack."

"Then how did I come to be so very fond of you?" In answer to this she merely made a grimace at him. "I hadn't known her three days," continued he, "before I began to feel how impossible it would be to say anything to her that ought not to be said."

"That is just like the world all over,"

said Mrs. Houghton. "When a man really falls in love with a woman, he always makes her such a goddess that he doesn't dare to speak to her. The effect is that women are obliged to put up with men who are not in love with them—either that, or vouchsafe to tell their own little story—when, lo! they are goddesses no longer."

"I daresay it's very ridiculous," said Jack, in a mooning, despondent way. "I daresay I'm not the man I ought to be, after the advantages I have had in such friends as you and others."

"If you try to be severe to me, I'll quarrel with you."

"Not severe at all. I'm quite in earnest. A man, and a woman too, have to choose which kind of rôle shall be played. There is innocence and purity, combined with going to church and seeing that the children's faces are washed. The game is rather slow, but it lasts a long time, and leads to great capacity for digesting your dinner in old age. You and I haven't gone in for that."

"Do you mean to say that I am not innocent?"

"Then there is the devil with all his works—which I own are, for the most part, pleasant works to me. I have always had a liking for the devil."

"Jack!"

"It is pleasant to do as one likes, and enjoy the full liberty of a debauched conscience. But there are attendant evils. It costs money and wears out the constitution."

"I should have thought that you had never felt the latter evil."

"The money goes first, no doubt. This, however, must surely be clear. A man should make up his mind and not shilly-shally between the two."

"I should have thought you had made up your mind very absolutely."

"I thought so too, Adelaide, till I knew Lady George Germain. I'll tell you what I feel about her now. If I could have any hope that he would die, I would put myself into some reformatory to fit myself to be her second husband."

"Good heavens!"

"That is one idea that I have. Another is to cut his throat, and take my chance with the widow. She is simply the only woman I ever saw that I have liked all round."

"You come and tell me this, knowing what I think of her!"

"Why shouldn't I tell you? You don't want me to make love to you?"

"But a woman never cares to hear all these praises of another."

"It was you began it, and if I do speak of her I shall tell the truth. There is a freshness as of uncut flowers about her."

"Psha! Worms and grubs!"

"And when she laughs one dreams of a chaste Venus."

"My heavens, Jack! You should publish all that! Shall I tell you what you ought to do?"

"Hang myself."

"Just say to her all that you have said to me. You would soon find that she is not more holy than another."

"You think so."

"Of course I think so. The only thing that puzzles me is that you, Jack De Baron, should be led away to such idolatry. Why should she be different from others? Her father is a money-loving, selfish old reprobate, who was born in a stable. She married the first man that was brought to her, and has never cared for him because he does not laugh, and dance, and enjoy himself after her fashion. I don't suppose she is capable of caring very much for anybody, but she likes you better than anyone else. Have you seen her since the row at Mrs. Jones's?"

"No."

"You have not been, then?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't think she would wish to see me," said Jack. "All that affair must have troubled her."

"I don't know how that is. She has been in town ever since, and he certainly went down to Brotherton. He has come up, I suppose, in consequence of this row between the dean and his brother. I wonder what really did happen."

"They say that there was a scuffle, and that the parson had very much the best of it. The police were sent for, and all that kind of thing. I suppose the marquis said something very rough to him."

"Or he to the marquis, which is rather more likely. Well, good-day, Jack." They were now at the house-door in Berkeley Square. "Don't come in, because Houghton will be here." Then the door was opened. "But take my advice, and go and call in Munster Court at once. And, believe me, when you have found out what one woman is, you have found out what most women are. There are no such great differences."

It was then six o'clock, and he knew that in Munster Court they did not dine till near eight. There was still time with a friend so intimate as he was for what is styled a "morning" call. The words which his cousin had spoken had not turned him—had not convinced him. Were he again tempted to speak his real mind about this woman—as he had spoken in very truth his real mind—he would still express the same opinion. She was to him like a running stream to a man who had long bathed in stagnant waters. But the hideous doctrines which his cousin had preached to him were not without their effect. If she were as other women—meaning such women as Adelaide Houghton—or if she were not, why should he not find out the truth? He was well aware that she liked him. She had not scrupled to show him that by many signs. Why should he scruple to say a word that might show him how the wind blew? Then he remembered a few words which he had spoken, but which had been taken so innocently, that they, though they had been meant to be mischievous, had become innocent themselves. Even things impure became pure by contact with her. He was sure, quite sure, that his cousin was altogether wrong in her judgment. He knew that Adelaide Houghton could not recognise, and could not appreciate, a pure woman. But still, still it is so poor a thing to miss your plum because you do not dare to shake the tree. It is especially so if you are known as a professional stealer of plums.

When he got into Piccadilly he put himself into a cab, and had himself driven to the corner of Munster Court. It was a little street, gloomy to look at, with dingy doors and small houses, but with windows looking into St. James's Park. There was no way through it, so that he who entered it must either make his way into some house, or come back. He walked up to the door, and then taking out his watch, saw that it was half-past six. It was almost too late for calling. And then this thing that he intended to do required more thought than he had given it. Would it not be well for him that there should be something holy, even to him, in spite of that devil's advocate who had been so powerful with him? So he turned and, walking slowly back towards Parliament Street, got into another cab, and was taken to his club. "It has come out," said Major M'Mickmack to him, immediately on his entrance, "that

when the dean went to see Brotherton at the hotel, Brotherton called Lady George all the bad names he could put his tongue to."

"I daresay. He is blackguard enough for anything," said De Baron.

"Then the old dean took his lordship in his arms, and pitched him bang into the fireplace. I had it all from the police myself."

"I always liked the dean."

"They say he is as strong as Hercules," continued M'Mickmack. "But he is to lose his deanery."

"Gammon!"

"You just ask any of the fellows that know. Fancy a clergyman pitching a marquis into the fire!"

"Fancy a father not doing so if the marquis spoke ill of his daughter," said Jack De Baron.

OUR COUNTRY HOUSE IN HESSE.

It is now five years since I first went to spend the summer months on a large estate belonging to my husband in the Werrathal—a district probably as unknown to the ordinary British tourist as the high plateau of Central Africa itself. It lies in the very heart of North Germany, a little to the south of the Hartz Mountains, a little to the north of Thuringia; with its line of small Saxon duchies. Eisenach, with its pretty environs and its historic Wartburg, is within a four-hours' drive along a good and almost level road. Yet the place is quite out of the world, and, though the new railroad from Berlin to Metz, which is being rapidly made, will pass within a short distance of the village, it is likely still to remain unvisited. The country, pretty and well wooded as it is, presents no striking features to allure lovers of the picturesque; nor are the little old towns, which are scattered about the valley, rich enough in architectural quaintness or in historic interest to afford good gleanings for the artist or the archaeologist; while the manners and customs of the inhabitants, and the accommodation likely to be met with in the small inns, are so primitive—to use the mildest adjective which will convey my meaning—that I should advise no one to attempt the journey.

The village of Hausen, consisting of about fifty houses, is on the left bank of the Werra, a rapid stream which rises in

Thuringia, and which becomes navigable at the small post-town of Wanfried, just below the village, and flows eventually into the Weser. The valley is broad and tolerably fertile, enclosed by two ranges of swelling hills, from three to four hundred feet in height, mostly covered with wood, but diversified here and there by huge masses of basalt rock, which look like the ruins of Cyclopean walls and battlements. The largest of these, the Helder Stein, is a beautiful object when flushed by the purple glow of sunset, or silvered by the rays of the great harvest-moon. Hausen is on the frontier of Electoral Hesse at its junction with Prussia. A number of mossy stones which mark the old division of the two countries form for some distance the boundary of the estate itself. Like most German estates, this one is unenclosed, and only a practised eye can tell which patch of ground belongs to the baron, and which to the peasant who lives at his gate.

There cannot be, in all the world, a greater contrast than that between German and English life. To me it has been a puzzle for many years how two nations so closely allied by blood, by language, by the thousand influences which mould the early development of a people, should, even through the lapse of centuries, have fallen so completely asunder, that the deepest feelings and the noblest aspirations of the Englishman should be well-nigh incomprehensible to his Teuton cousin. The Englishwoman who settles in Germany must realise this, and strive to forget much to which she has been accustomed from her earliest days. It is not too much to say that the comfort of her home life depends in a measure on her power of doing this. The peace and privacy, the neatness and refinement, and all the thousand little courtesies of an English home, are to the German nothing but ridiculous affectations, if not sinful extravagances; and so deeply rooted is the national roughness in these matters that no attempt to produce even a moderate amount of civilisation is likely to yield any result. I am not going to relate my housekeeping experiences; that is a theme which lies very close to the heart of every mother of a family, and one on which the female tongue is apt to wax unduly loquacious. Suffice it to say that German housekeeping is a weariness and vexation of spirit, to anyone who likes to see things done decently and in order.

Our country-house stands in closest proximity to the village. There is scarcely a room where you can sit in peace, undisturbed by the laughing, quarrelling, singing, or swearing of the villagers; scarcely a window out of which you can look without seeing sights which must shock and distress anyone of refined feeling. It is the most curious dwelling that can be imagined; at a distance you would suppose it to be a number of separate tenements standing near each other, only on a closer inspection do you discern that it is but one building after all. Cows, horses, pigs, sheep, church, farm-servants, and "quality," all are under the same roof. Driving down the village street you pass under a great arched gateway, surmounted by warlike trophies carved in stone, and you find yourself in the midst of a large square farmyard, entirely surrounded by barns and stables. This in old days was the schloss itself—the Rothe Schloss, as it used to be called, for it was built of red sandstone, and all the carved timber in the upper stories was stained to a deep vermillion. In the Thirty Years' War it was burnt down, like most of its neighbours, and its owners were too poor or too frightened to build it up again; so they raised walls of wood and plaster on the strong stone foundations which had survived the conflagration, adding on a piece here or a piece there, as they required more accommodation, building the church in 1720, and half a century later throwing out a long wing towards the river, at right angles with the main building. This is the modern dwelling-house, the original schloss having long since been appropriated to farm purposes. A few old rooms on the upper floor have been retained for the use of the family, and are connected with the wing by two long wide passages or galleries, which form an invaluable playground for the children in rainy weather. A second and lower archway under the church-tower leads into the inner court, which the builder of the wing intended, perhaps, for a private court for the "Herrschaft." It is anything but private now. A clean dairy and an unclean hen-house occupy the side nearest the church; outhouses, large and small, stand at the other sides. One of them used to be a distillery, for a former proprietor used to make his own schnapps, and pay his labourers partly in the horrible beverage, which for generations has been destroying them morally and physically. Now these

buildings are used for the wheelwrights, wood-sawyers, &c. Occasionally the court is full of men cutting up the firewood, and village crones, with huge baskets on their backs, carrying it into the various storehouses. At these times the place swarms with shock-headed young savages, for the children consider they have a right to play about wherever their mothers are at work. Great vigilance is required to keep them from making raids into the lower story of the dwelling-house. There is neither porch nor hall, and the door, which stands open all day long, admits at once into a passage paved with red tiles, and leading from the kitchen at one end to the servants' bedrooms at the other. Sometimes a proud turkey with her young family may be met patrolling this passage; sometimes a funny little dachshund is discovered curled up inside the largest stew-pan; or a chicken, which prefers our kitchen to its own legitimate abode, is found roosting on the hot-plate. Yet, primitive as it is, the place has been the abode of grand folks in its day. At one time it belonged to the baronial family of the Geisos, and later, for many years, it was the home of the Princes of Hesse-Barchfeld, a branch of the royal family itself. Surely in those days grantees must have been easily satisfied!

There is a strange dearth of historical memories and traditions about the house, although some stirring scenes in the long drama of German history have been played in its neighbourhood, and its owners have possibly been among the actors. Human victims were sacrificed on the Helder Stein in the dark days of druidical superstition; the great monk of Netley passed through the valley on his noble mission, leaving his secular name of Winfred to the little town of Wanfried, and founding the small Gothic chapel on the knoll by the bridge that crosses the Werra at Kreuzburg. The billows of the Thirty Years' War swept hither and thither over the miserable land, engulfing noble and vassal in one common ruin, and leaving scarce a vestige of former days when the storm at last spent its fury and sunk to rest; French armies marched to the north and to the south of the valley, which had nothing to tempt them to a closer acquaintance with it; the people paid their taxes to Jerome when Cassel was the capital of Westphalia, and Hessian nobles vied with one another in seeking places about his court. Then the reaction set in, and a tablet in

the church records the names of fourteen Hauseners who were "out" in the years '14 and '15. A second tablet, recently erected, commemorates the fifteen village heroes of 1870. Private feuds in plenty have been fought out and left no trace; but at least one dark and gruesome deed took place in the large vaults now used as the farm cellars. Two years ago, in the course of some repairs, it was necessary to remove a flight of stone steps leading from one vault to the other. Under the first step was found a human skull, which, after being passed from hand to hand, giving rise to endless conjectures, was finally thrown into the Werra. A few hours later, when the rest of the stairs were removed, the entire skeleton was found. It appeared to be that of a young woman, and had evidently been roughly and hastily thrust out of sight. But when or how the poor creature perished no one could ever tell. The mystery remains, like many other dark deeds, to be revealed only when the sea itself shall be made to give up its dead.

Farming in Germany may be profitable, but it is not pretty. The cows, from fifty to sixty in number, all live in one large stable to the right of the great gateway. Each cow has her own stall and manger, and receives a bountiful portion of food and water; but there she stays all her life, never knowing the sweets of freshly-cropped grass, nor the freedom of the sunny meadow. The very pigs live in close confinement, and seldom get the chance of exercise; while the sheep, which are taken out every morning between eight and nine, are marched back at nightfall, and locked up in their stable. Now and then, when harvest is over, they are allowed to spend a few nights in the fields, where a curious wooden erection, looking like a grey coffin on wheels, serves as a bed for the shepherd, who never leaves them to themselves. In winter their daily exercise is curtailed, and, when the cold is intense, ceases altogether. The farm-servants live in the stables—that is, one man sleeps in each stable, with the horses, cows, and sheep. Wages are moderate, compared to other parts of Germany—very moderate compared to those in England—and the men all receive their board at the farm. Those who have families in the village are allowed to carry their portion away with them if they like.

The Hessians are not an interesting people; rough, hard-featured, with a keen

eye to their own interests, a very hazy idea about their neighbours' rights of property, a fatal penchant for spirituous liquors, and a strong desire to fight with everybody when they are not sober. Pitched battles between husbands and wives, mothers and sons, are not unfrequent; and it is well when they use only the weapons with which nature has provided them, for scythes and reaping-hooks are sometimes snatched up in family disputes. Among Germans they have the reputation of being stupid and obstinate. Our English annals have had many opportunities of testifying to their bravery; and they were loyal to their prince, as long as they had one, and still speak kindly of the last one, who, if he did little for them, let them alone, and neither worried them by interference in their domestic concerns nor exacted many taxes. Now King Stork has succeeded King Log; taxes are trebled, quadrupled; old laws, civil and religious, swept away; vexatious new ones introduced, and grumblings are proportionately bitter. Emigration has gone on for generations; there are few families which have not some near relatives in America, usually in a far superior position to those at home. I am inclined to think that the energetic and adventurous spirits have left their fatherland, and that only the dull and supine have remained in it. This is almost the only way to account for the difference between the German as he is supposed to be abroad, and the German as he really is at home.

A Hessian Dorf on a week-day is an unlovely sight; the dirt, the squalor, the general wretchedness, make one's very heart ache; yet Hausen is by no means a poor place. Each peasant has some property of his own—a house, a field, a cow or two, is the average wealth; but some of the villagers are quite rich people in their way, with fortunes of one thousand or even two thousand pounds, and lands which have come down from father to son for four or five hundred years. The houses stand sideways, with gable-ends towards the street, and unsavoury yards in front of their doors, where the pigs disport themselves at their own sweet will, sharing the midden with the barefooted children who are too young to go to school. The geese are taken out every morning by a tattered little boy or girl, who drives the whole flock along the road to its appointed pasture, keeps watch through the day, and brings it back in the evening. Each goose knows its own home, and drops out of the

procession at the right moment, waddling solemnly up to its stable to put itself to bed. The cows are driven out daily in the same way by the village cowherd. Curiously enough they enjoy the freedom which is denied to the aristocratic cattle—they have the right of pasture on the baron's land; as long as one haycock remains standing they cannot be driven in, but as soon as the last wain of hay has passed out, in goes the village herd and revels in the broad meadow.

The German has as little idea of privacy in his family life as of reticence in his conversation. Last year a house in the middle of the village was undergoing repairs; the gable was shored up, the wall towards the street removed, and for weeks the family lived day and night in full view of all passers-by. It was warm summer weather, and they never thought of hanging up a curtain, or contriving a screen to shield themselves from public gaze. If you chance to take an early walk on Sunday mornings you will see strange sights in the village. Toilets are not necessary on work-days, but on Sunday there is a general smartening up, which is usually performed *al fresco*. On one doorstep a dishevelled matron, a tub of cold water by her side, is scrubbing a nude urchin of six, before putting him into the Sunday clothes which have been religiously hidden away all the week; a few yards off the owner of the next cottage sits on a chair in front of his abode, placidly submitting to the operations of the village barber. By church time they are all astir in their finery; not that many of them go to church; there is usually but a scant congregation. The services, at ten and at one o'clock, are held alternately by the clergyman and the schoolmaster. The church is dirty and dilapidated, and looks as if it had not been cleaned for years. The worshippers are separated, as in all German Protestant churches—the women sit downstairs, the men in the gallery; an exception being made for the "quality," who have a pew to themselves, and can enjoy the luxury of sitting together to hear the sermon. There are but two days on which I have seen a full attendance, a school feast and a wedding. The former takes place every year before the summer holidays. The children are placed round the altar, the boys with clean faces, shoes, and stockings, the girls with flowers in their hair. The friends and parents pretty well fill the church, and the schoolmaster holds a

regular examination, making his pupils stand up and read in classes, and answer questions from the Bible, catechism, &c.; copy-books are handed to the burgermeister, the baron, and the rest of the congregation; hymns are sung, and a collection made to provide refreshments for the children during the afternoon; and then they adjourn to the Tanz Platz, a round place shaded by a few lime-trees, just outside our farmyard-gate and just opposite the largest of the two public-houses in the village. A band is in attendance, and the children dance till bed time; and then the elders take their places, and keep it up till the small hours.

A wedding of course makes a great stir in the little place; and one Sunday two weddings were solemnised together. One bride was the old mason's daughter, who married a weaver from Burschla; the other bridegroom was our old cowman, Adam, a poor, miserable-looking object, deaf, short-sighted, and looking half-idiotic. He was the one who slept in the cow-house, and he used to be seen about the yard in the smallest possible amount of clothing compatible with German notions of decency—his legs bare from the knee, or incased, in cold weather, in footless stockings reaching but half-way up. It was a wonder that such an Adam could ever find an Eve to look at him! Yet we were told he was a decent creature, when not in his cups, and was supposed to have saved some money; so an evil-looking widow captured him, and he came on the Saturday to invite us to his wedding. We stood at the window while the bells rang, for the bridal procession as it crossed the farmyard to the church-door was a most comical sight. First went the mason's party; but that was a quiet wedding, and need not detain us long. The cowman was the hero of the day. A band of music preceded him and his bride, and nearly all the village followed them, the younger women with flowers in their hair, the elder ones wearing the queer little peaked cap of black satin with long bows hanging down behind—the holiday coiffure of the Hessian peasantry. But the men were the most wonderful objects. They were attired in hats and coats of marvellous workmanship—heirlooms which had been treasured up for generations—long blue coats with tails sweeping the ground; black beaver hats with nap an inch in length, never made for the heads they then adorned. One had his set on the

very crown, no persuasion would induce it to go on further; another rested on the tip of the wearer's nose, and his companions led him along blindfold in the festive throng. In church the couples stood in front of the altar while the wedding hymn was sung; rings were exchanged, and the clergyman made a very long speech about their reciprocal duties. While we were at our early dinner the happy pair marched in to receive our congratulations; Adam brandishing a huge tankard of ale, Eve carrying some cake of her own making. We were expected to partake of both refreshments. The baron, wishing him joy, drank Adam's health and handed back the tankard, but he strode up to the table, and flourishing it high in the air shouted, "Die Weibspersonen sollen trinken!" With great difficulty he was made to understand that the English ladies drank nothing but water—a most amazing weakness in his estimation. All that day and all the next the village was mad with excitement; dressing up and going from house to house, dancing, drinking, and shouting. On the Monday morning the other couple came to call. As they did not belong to the house they were received on the steps, with all the idlers of the place forming a background. They were not so grand as Adam, and brought their refreshment in a black bottle, which the baron, after making them a speech, put to his lips, thinking it was beer, and found, to his consternation, that it was strong schnapps. He could not affront the merry-makers, so he had to gulp it down as he best could, trying hard not to look rueful as he did so.

It is wonderful what a craze Germans have for dancing. Every possible occasion, public or private, is made an excuse for open-air dancing, to which all flock. Even the house-servants disappear, without asking leave or license, and may be seen spinning round in almost interminable waltzes and polkas. Sunday is the great dancing day; but one day does not content them, they always take the Monday also with us, and in other districts they take Tuesday as well. The entertainment begins as soon as church is over, and is prolonged far into the night. By law it ought to cease at midnight, but the law is not always rigidly enforced; everything is done by the Government to keep up a military spirit among the people, and on patriotic anniversaries the gendarme is conveniently deaf, and lets them go on till

two o'clock, or later if they will. Each village in the valley sent its contingent to the armies of 1870, and each village celebrates its war festival on a different anniversary; so that the warriors and their friends have ample opportunities of enjoying themselves, till their pockets are empty and their brains bewildered. Of course, the work done after such revels is both scant and bad, and a considerable portion of their earnings must be spent at each feast. My young English governess remarked that the Germans must be very rich, for the English could never afford such frequent holidays and junketings; and she cannot be very far wrong, for this summer, in a small town in the Hartz where the dancing was kept up on Sunday and the two following days, beginning at eleven A.M. and lasting till broad daylight on the following morning, the people paid one hundred and ten thalers (sixteen pounds eight shillings) for the band alone.

On one Sedan Feier, during the afternoon when the mirth was at its height, a man came up and confidentially informed our farm inspektor that two or three others had plotted to rob an outlying field of the Herr Baron's that very night, when all were on the Tanz Platz. He was to have been one of them, but qualms of conscience had induced him to turn king's evidence. The inspektor held a consultation with his master and with Herr Hose the builder—the most intelligent man in the place—and the result was that a counter-plot was laid, the informer was sworn to secrecy, and the inspektor and Herr Hose set out secretly to watch for the thieves. They patrolled the fields all night long, but no one came near them; whether the informer's conscience had led him to give a hint to his comrades, or whether the whole affair had been but a dream of his schnappa-disordered brain. For two days the inspektor went about, stern and silent, evidently fancying the whole village was laughing in its sleeve at the hoax which had been played on him; on the third a glorious opportunity of revenge came within his reach. The village geese had often been seen trespassing in the baron's fields and had been driven out again; but this time thirty trespassers were caught in the corn, and were impounded in the farmyard. The crier was sent round to proclaim that those who had lost their geese should come to claim them in the yard at six P.M., and should receive them on pay-

ment of a fine of one mark (one shilling) per goose. However, instead of leaving the matter in the hands of his inspektor, who would have shown no mercy, the Herr Baron must needs go down at six to see the fun. Of course he was instantly surrounded by a mob of old women, each protesting her innocence and bewailing her poverty; and, of course, the delinquents were let off with threepence instead of a shilling apiece. One old crone, the miller's wife, had no fewer than twelve geese in the pound. She stood glowering at them as they waddled out in single file amid the laughter of the bystanders, made a sudden swoop upon a venerable gander which brought up the rear, gave him a sound whipping, and flung him from her, exclaiming that he was the sinner who led all her innocent fowls astray. The burgermeister's geese used to trespass regularly on the upper fields belonging to the farm, but his old gander had been regularly trained for the purpose. He always took up a commanding position, and if he saw anyone approaching he used to set up a warning cackle, and the whole flock would instantly collect and follow him to a place of safety. At last the Herr Baron, who had long kept his eye upon him, shot him before he could get off his premises, and from that day the burgermeister's geese have left his corn unplundered.

The Kirchweih is the last and greatest festival of the year. It takes place in the autumn, after all the field-work is over and the largest amount of farm-wages have been paid. It lasts four consecutive days and nights. On a Wednesday evening the musicians enter the village, the fun begins next morning and lasts till late on the Sunday night. It is a movable feast, and it always determines the date of our departure from Hausen; for country life in Germany is, generally speaking, only for the summer months. The approach of winter drives families into the towns, and the changeable and capricious spring is far advanced before they venture to leave their warm retreat.

THE DESERTED ROOM.

THE fire flames leapt about the logs,
As in the days of old;
About the silent room they played,
In chequer work of gleam and shade.
The Persian carpet on the floor,
Showed its dimmed beauty as of yore;
The portraits from the walls looked down,
And eye and lip in smile or frown,
The tale she taught them told.

The fire flames leapt about the hearth ;
The cricket sang its song ;
The ivory notes she loved so much,
Lay waiting for her wakening touch ;
Her own, or sister flowers, drooped,
Where the great crimson curtains looped ;
And by her chair her favourite book,
Its place, mute pleading for her, took
To rest, unopened long.

The fire flames leapt about the hearth ;
A sense of something gone
Hung heavy on the listening ear,
That used her joyous voice to hear ;
The echoes of the silent house
Waiting her flying foot to rouse ;
It seemed as ghosts her brightness laid,
In the dull stillness woke and strayed,
And long-lost empire won.

The fire flames leapt, and paled, and died ;
And in the eerie gloom
Sad memories gathered round the hearth,
Where she brought joy, and youth, and mirth ;
Sad fancies mingling with them said
Old tales of half-forgotten dead ;
And baffled prayers and visions met,
With loss, and longing, and regret,
In the deserted room.

NOTHING MORE!

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER III.

"I DID not think you could be so ill-natured!"

Hot tears fell thick and fast down Blanche Falconer's cheeks.

She let them flow more freely than many a fashionable lady in the present day would be willing to do, for as yet her face was innocent of blanc de perle and Ninon's bloom.

Marion Temple stood before this fair Niobe, and watched her with eyes that had a bewildered trouble in their brown depths.

"Keith thinks so much of what you say—oh, you needn't blush—you both have the same old-fashioned, the same absurd ideas! I assure you, long mourning, even for one's husband, is quite gone out of fashion; and Belle Vernon tells me there is quite a talk about the ridiculous seclusion in which Keith insists upon for a mother-in-law."

A quiver passed over Marion's lips.

"But then she was Mr. Falconer's mother, and you are—his wife!"

The girl's hands grew cold as she spoke, thinking of what that mother was.

Blanche gave her pretty shoulders the tiniest possible shrug, and then continued fretfully:

"What possible impropriety could there be in you and me going to Paris for a month with the Montagues? This Mrs. Mayne who is to chaperon you to Mau-

ritius makes no sign. My dear girl, can't you do me a good-natured turn, and tell my husband that you want to go?"

"Indeed, indeed, I can't!" said Marion, in much distress. "It wouldn't be true; and besides, think how lonely it would be for Mr. Falconer, left here with all the sad associations."

"Oh," put in Mr. Falconer's wife, "Keith can take very good care of himself; he's right enough as long as he has all those tiresome books, and his dog Merlin to go about the grounds at his heels. Belle Vernon says he is quite the most tiresome man she knows!"

Up flew the hot colour into Marion's face.

"I'm very young, I know, and perhaps I ought not to say it to you; but, dear Mrs. Falconer, do you really think anyone who can speak so to you, of your husband, can be a true friend?"

Blanche was not angry—she could not sufficiently gauge the bitterness of the reproof given her to be angry; besides, she was naturally sweet-tempered; so she gave a puzzled glance at the girl's earnest face, and said, with a little nod of her head: "It's a pity, I think, you didn't marry Keith yourself; you'd have vegetated through life together, my dear!"

Marion was dumb.

Oh many a shaft at random sent
Finds mark the archer little meant!

At last the silence was broken by Blanche.

"You say you are 'very young,' my dear girl; but, after all, people are as old as they look; and Charley Durant thought you were older than me!"

This "shaft" found no mark at all; for Marion was not in the least alive to the ignominy of this mistake on Mr. Durant's part.

"That is very likely," she said simply, "I have had so much trouble, you see."

And for a moment her sight was dimmed and blurred with tears.

Mrs. Falconer yawned, once—twice—thrice.

She knew that she had played her last card in the matter of the visit to Paris, and had failed.

"A person like me is buried, actually buried alive in this horrid place!"

This with a plaintive sigh, and a weary glance at the prospect seen from the window near which the two women were seated.

Now "this horrid place" was Glenluna, and it was at that moment looking its fairest

and best. The bay lay glinting in the level rays of the western sun; on either shore, sentinel-wise, stood the purple hills, with here and there the ruby gleam of the heather on their steep declivities. Above, was a dappled sky, pied blue and white. Now and again came the wafting of sea-gulls' wings, or the swift drop of their snowy breasts as they dipped down to rest a moment on the rippling sea. Across the harbour-mouth was a shaft of light, pale, bright turquoise blue; while a marvellous sheen of gold touched the base of the hills, and catching a fishing-smack as it swayed to the breeze, turned it to a fairy barge with a golden sail. Each moment the colours of this panorama deepened and grew more exquisitely bright, and Marion gazing, knew not that for ever, and for evermore, the memory of that picture was to linger on her heart, graven by the hand of pain. Blanche has presently rustled from the room, and the sound of the piano in the distant drawing-room lets Marion know that she is solacing her dulness with such poor means as lie within her reach.

The girl was well pleased to be left alone, for brooding over her was that strange presentiment knowledge of coming pain which we have all experienced at one time or other. The work fell from her hands, and she was thinking so intently, that she started at the opening of the door. It was only a servant with a letter, that had just arrived by the evening post. By no means a remarkable-looking document either; yet, as Marion read it, every shade of colour left her cheek, and a sickening pang pierced her heart.

The letter was a summons to start almost immediately upon her journey to Mauritius; a summons to leave Glenluna, and—Keith Falconer. What was this anguish of desolation that overwhelmed her at the thought? Why had she to stifle a cry that strove to come from her lips as the bitter truth was laid bare before her—the bitter, cruel truth, that her path and his can no more lie side by side? What has she been doing in all the happy weeks that are past, and can never, never come again? She has watched a man's struggles, and pitied a man's misery, until she has learnt to love him, and now—as soon as possible, now at once—she must go!

She realised more than this as she crouched down upon the wide low window-seat, and hid her eyes with her hands. She realised that never more in all the

years to come shall she meet another man like Keith Falconer; never another who shall understand her to the finest fibre of her nature, as he does. And as she thought this, a sudden sense of how his life too will seem empty for the loss of her, a sudden revelation of the truth that his heart has grown to hers, as hers to his, set her heart throbbing madly. It almost seems to stand still though at the sound of a footstep in the corridor; and by the time Keith Falconer opens the door the sweet sad face is white from brow to chin.

"Oh, you are here," he said contentedly. "I have been looking for you; you were right about——"

But here he caught sight of her face.

"Marion—child—what is it?"

She rose from her place in the window, and put Mrs. Mayne's letter into his hand.

"It is a letter from Mrs. Mayne; she sails from Southampton on Thursday. She is sorry to give me such short notice; her own plans have been rather hurried, you see."

Silence!

Neither Keith nor his companion spoke.

He held Mrs. Mayne's letter in his hand, and looked at it with all his might; yet he could not decipher one single word if his life had depended on it. But Marion was no weak, hysteria-ridden woman, to fail without an effort for victory in the day of trial; so she fought for courage, and attained it.

"Of course I must go with Mrs. Mayne. I shall write at once, so as to catch the night post; it will be best for me to meet her at Southampton on the Wednesday night."

Keith dared not look at her; it seemed to him as if never—never since the day when she came across his path, like a star shining out on a dark night, had he so realised what would be the desolation of his life without her.

Another thought too, one whose bitterness is well-nigh unbearable, comes across him: this girl, so young, so innocent, yet so passionately loving, is in some sort a sacred trust from the mother whom he loved, and whom he now mourns; and he, Keith Falconer, without thought or intent of wrong, has cruelly blighted her young life. Full well he knows, that even as he loves, so is he loved; and he recognises the truth, even as the girl herself has done, that nothing so complete as the sympathy

and the companionship that he has given her shall ever come into her life again.

While Marion spoke of her plans, Keith listened to the sound of her voice as we listen to words spoken in a dream.

"Yes," he said, "you are quite right; you had better write at once."

Then he left her.

And as she looked out on the landscape that had been so fair in the glory of the sinking sun, lo! the soft turquoise blue, and the golden sheen, and the red and purple reflections in the mirror of the bay, were all gone, and a dead, cold, grey shadow was creeping over the world.

"Fancy!" said Mrs. Falconer to her guest next morning, "Keith was up and off before any of us were awake! He has gone to town on pressing business; he only settled to go last night, and I was to tell you he will be at Southampton to see you off on Thursday."

Blanche was radiant; her husband's society was at all times irksome to her, and his rare absences were quite holiday-times in her estimation.

And Marion, seeing this, suffered for him so intensely, that for the time being her own sorrow was forgotten.

"Could nothing make things different? Why cannot she love him? Why is she blind to the noble nature of the man whose name she bears?"

Thus the girl pondered through the hours of that weary day. She would have cut off her little white hand, and gone maimed for the rest of her life gladly, if by so doing she could have drawn these two—husband and wife—close to one another. That is not love which is full of self-pleasing, which strives to drag down, not to upraise; for the core of a love that is pure and true is the longing to help, not hinder.

When Marion met Mrs. Mayne, she felt at once that fate had been kind in giving her such a companion. She cheered the girl by bright and sparkling descriptions of life in the Isle of France; descriptions not one whit too highly coloured (as Marion found in the days that were yet to come); she told her of her Aunt Millicent's perfections, and pictured pleasantly the quiet happiness that might be found in her companionship. And the girl listened, taking comfort; yet with one thought ever present to her heart—Keith would come; he would come and say good-bye! When he did come, Marion chanced to be

alone, and as he clasped her cold and trembling hands in his, the man at first could find no words to say. The pain of the parting that was so near stripped off all disguise from either; and each, looking at the other, knew that "the bitterness of death" had come.

"I have very little time to stay," Keith said at last. "I cannot go on board with you; I must go up to town again by the next train."

And Marion knew that he would fain shorten the pain of this interview for her sake. "I shall do very well," she said, smiling bravely, "Mrs. Mayne is so kind; and she has told me delightful things of Aunt Milly. She was kind in another thing, too; she said I was going to say good-bye to an old friend, and that she was a new one, and so she went off to see after our cabins, and left me here to see you alone."

She said this, looking up into his face with her lovely haggard eyes, and oh, the pitifulness of the story that they told him! It is given to none of us to be always on guard, always wise, and this was the hour of Keith Falconer's weakness.

He crushed her hands in his: he looked with despairing eyes into her paling face.

"Child," he said hoarsely, "you will not forget me, will you? You know how it is with me; you know what my life is; and that parting with you is like tearing the heart out from my breast. Oh, my darling, let me think that you will remember me sometimes! Pray for me too, Marion. Pray God for me that I fail not—"

He had drawn her to his breast, and held her fast and close with arms that trembled as they clasped her; her grave, sad, tender eyes looked into his, her lips were white, but she spoke with steadfast calmness:

"I shall never forget you—never. I want to be a help to you, not a hindrance; I am glad you will find help in knowing that I am thinking of you—for indeed I will! And I will pray each night and morning, through all the years to come, that God may help you; for I know, oh Keith—I know how hard it is!"

"Hard!" he muttered, setting his teeth. "If you only knew!"

It was the one sole murmur that ever passed the man's lips in all the years of a wearisome bondage.

"I think I do know," said the girl softly.

There was silence after this, and then

Keith Falconer bent his head until his lips lay close upon her mouth.

A moment more, and she stood blind and dazed with grief—alone.

CHAPTER IV.

TEN years have passed away since Marion Temple and Keith Falconer parted.

We left Marion a girl, full of a girl's impulsive sensitiveness, we find her a woman, calmed and disciplined by the experience of life.

A fair woman too; fairer in her ripened years than in her youth. Time's hand has deepened the steadfast eyes, and given a greater sweetness to the smile—the smile, that is rarer than of yore. Her form has gained in fulness, without losing its supple grace, and her quiet voice tells of a peace won by self-conquest.

Yet with all these love-winning attributes, Marion in all these long years has had no lover. Among men she has had many friends; there have been those who have loved her as a man loves the woman whose uplifting friendship holds him back from all evil; but something that no man has ever tried to set aside has hedged her round, so that none have borne to her that dearest, closest love, that would fain claim all a woman has to give. No word from Keith Falconer has reached her throughout the ten years that have gone by since he and she parted—save once, when, after reaching Mauritius, Marion wrote to tell him of her safety, and to her short, almost formal letter, came a few lines of kind wishes for her happiness in her new home.

Nothing more!

Nothing more—through the quiet nights in that lovely land, when the “hush of the starshine” seemed to cradle regretful memories—nothing more during that awful time, when a dank mist lay low over the cane-tracts, and girdled the great rocky hills—when a terrible pestilence devastated the Isle of France, and the sea sobbing against the coral-reefs seemed to sing a ceaseless dirge for the many dead; through joy and sorrow, weal and woe, no word or sign from Keith Falconer reached the woman he had loved so passionately, yet so hopelessly. For he would not hold her to him by one single link of his own forging; she was young and untried by the world, life was all before her, she would perchance forget, and form new ties; he tried to think, he hoped that this might be so; perhaps there were times and seasons when he really did hope it.

And she?

Well, she just took up her life as it was, and lived it up to its highest capability. Had she been one to yield herself a prey to weak repining thoughts, I had never written her story. She accepted Keith's silence, knowing through that quick instinctive sympathy with him which no separating seas, no new, strange surroundings could destroy, how wisely it was meant. Nor had she been unhappy in the passing of the years.

It is only the selfish and feeble ones who refuse to see any brightness in earth's garden because the fairest flower it held for them is out of their reach. “It might have been” does very well for a day-dream; “it is” is a better thought to spur us on to “act in the living present.”

Marion had learnt to love the land of her adoption, its ways, and its people.

Close companionship had drawn Aunt Milly and herself daily nearer to each other; a pleasant, refined, and cultured coterie had gathered about them; indeed, there were few houses so popular in the island as Marinette, Aunt Milly's domain. It nestles among luxuriant trees, and the pillars of its wide verandahs are wreathed and entwined with beauteous climbing plants. The garden runs down-hill to the sea, and a quarter of a mile off are the reefs, above which the waves curl and beat like living things.

Everyone in the island says that this year, of which I am now writing, has been the richest and the ripest known for many a long day. It is as though Nature would fain try to heal the wounds made by the pestilence a year ago; fain give all the comfort she can to bereaved hearts and tear-dimmed eyes, by her beauty. And for Marion every flower has a fairer tint, a sweeter perfume than in all the years of her life that are past. . . .

For is not Keith Falconer free—free to seek her—free to claim her as his own?

It is six months ago now since the knowledge of this possible joy disturbed the even tenor of her days; but, when first she read the record of his wife's death—read that “Blanche, wife of Keith Falconer, M.P.,” had only lived to be thirty-four years, Marion hardly gave a thought to herself. Like most of us when we hear that some shallow, frivolous creature has passed away to the land of reality, she gave a quick shudder, and could not for a moment grasp the idea of immortality for such a petty trifle.

But as the weeks passed on, a new and beautiful life seemed to awaken and stir in her heart, and she realised the intensity of passionate gladness enfolded in the thought of seeing Keith once again. No longer young; changed it might be in many outward things, but the same, the very same to her, as when together they watched the sunlight die away from the hills about Glenluna Bay, and knew that the light of their own lives was fading too! She loved to wander alone along the rocky shore, where here and there streamlets from the hills came tumbling and trilling down to the sea: the waves sobbing above the coral-reefs that had once seemed to chant a requiem, now seemed attuned to the dear refrain: "He will come—he will come to me soon!" The fireflies glittering in the woods at night seemed of a new and brighter beauty, and the "hush of the starshine" that had seemed once to cradle regret, now throbbed with the silence of passion too deep for words. She never doubted that the man she loved so well had done his duty nobly to the end by the woman, whose shallow nature had been, while she lived, as a millstone about his neck; equally, she never doubted that the woman he had loved and parted from ten years ago was as dear to him now as then. That he would come to her when time was ripe, she never doubted either.

There is "love, and love," you see; and the highest, truest love depends but little on mere external things, it needs not words and looks, and sweet assurances to keep it alive!

Well, in the midst of all the tropical loveliness that adorned the island that was Marion's home, a sudden gloom descended upon the face of nature, like a dark veil over the face of a beautiful woman. Clouds gathered in dull gray masses where sea and sky met. A sinister moaning came from the reefs, birds flew low, and fluttered here and there in fear, obedient to a subtle instinct of coming danger.

And what was the strange spirit of restlessness that possessed the soul of the woman whose story I am telling?

Why did she wander, restless as the birds, from room to room, from garden to verandah, gazing seaward with a look as of a troubled expectancy?

"What ails you, dearest one?" said Aunt Milly, imprisoning the restless hands.

"I do not know," answered Marion. "I cannot tell; the sea out there seems to

have something to say to me, something that I must listen to."

Oh, what a weary troubled look was in the depths of the brown eyes that Keith Falconer had loved so well as she spoke!

Much as she loved her niece, Aunt Milly was always just a little afraid of her; and so now she forbore to question any more, only wondering at the strange light in the eyes that were usually so sad and sweet, and at the quiver of suppressed passion round her mouth. The day was dying, the night was coming on.

Marion waited until Aunt Milly had left the room, then she wrapped a crimson shawl about her head, and stole away down the long garden to the shore. A longing that she could not resist drew her to the sea—the sea that was moaning out some message meant for her ears alone.

Pierrot Le Brun, an old servant of the household, met her on her way. It was strange, he thought, that she should be out alone, with the murky darkness falling, and a storm coming on; but then, what would you? "M'zelle," was like no one else in all the island. In the eyes of its humbler inhabitants, she could do no wrong; had she not nursed the sick and tended the dying in the days of that awful pestilence, and seemed to bear a charmed life?

"It is rough to-night, m'zelle," said the old man, standing cap in hand beside her; "there was a ship trying to make for the Fanfaron awhile ago, but I think none could pass the reefs now; the good God help all poor souls out at sea to-night!"

Then he passed on, and Marion went her way.

Her head was bowed low upon her breast, and like the diapason of some pleading litany, old Pierrot's words seemed to ring in her ears: "The good God help all poor souls out at sea to-night!"

Once on the shore, she saw with awe-struck eyes, that all along the western horizon lay low a line of lurid light, a red, angry light, the like of which her eyes had never seen before. Above and all around the heavens were black, and seemed to sway downwards towards the earth, as though from the weight of their own density. She stretched out her arms towards that low-lying bar of light, against which the tossing waves made a line of foam. Had the sullen roar of the sea, in truth, some message to her from the heart that was one with hers?

"What is it? My love! my love!

where are you?" she moaned, with passionate, tearless sobs. "Wherever you are, you are wanting me—and oh, I cannot come!"

A great yearning ached at her heart; a terrible longing, that was the answer to a spirit-cry from afar, consumed her soul.

She clasped her hands as one who prays, and once again that litany of pleading came from her white lips. "The—good—God—help—all—poor—souls—out—at—sea—to-night!"

Suddenly the blackness overhead was cleft by a dazzling shaft of light, and the very ground beneath her feet seemed to vibrate with the awful crash of the thunder. Yet she felt no fear.

Pierrot had ventured before this to turn back and make his way to the place where she stood; but he had only stood sentinel near her, he had not spoken. Now a young sapling at some distance from where he stood was suddenly seized as it were by some invisible hand, and wrenched, and twisted, and bowed almost to the earth.

"M'zelle! m'zelle!" he shouted, springing down the shore to Marion's side. "It is the hurricane—come—haste—do not stay!"

As she turned towards him, the crimson shawl was torn from her head, and whirled aloft out of sight, and in another moment, she and Pierrot were fighting with the tempest, he dragging her along by the hand, until they gained the shelter of Marinette.

A spell of lovely tropical weather, calm and bright, followed the storm of that fearful night; the sky was blue as the inner petals of a violet, the sea lapped softly on the shore, the gay-plumaged birds preened themselves in the orange and mango trees. Yet Aunt Milly saw with wonder that a strange watchful eagerness was still shining in her darling's eyes. At any footfall, Marion's colour came and went; at night she laid her down, and lay sleepless and expectant till the morning. So, at last, what her spirit watched for came.

It was Aunt Milly who put into her hand the paper that contained it—the paper that told how the good ship *Ariadne* had gone down off the Cape; and gave among the list of the lost, the name of Keith Falconer.

"He was coming to me—there is his name that has been graven on my heart all these

weary years. I shall never see him any more—but, oh my darling, I shall always know that you were—coming—to—me!"

She fell upon her knees at Aunt Milly's feet, looking up into her face with eyes full of a dumb anguish; then she slid to the floor, and lay there white and still.

It is a marvel what hearts can bear, and yet not cease to beat.

Marion Temple did not die, she lived; nay more, she did her life's work well and bravely—lived, as he who had so loved her would have had her live—for the good of those around her. "It is only waiting a little longer," she once said to Aunt Milly, and though auntie's old eyes were blinded with tears as she listened, Marion's were dry.

She knew that her love was "coming to her;" she knew that he had loved her the same through all the long years of silence and separation; she knew that, if Heaven had willed it so, her happy head would yet have rested on his breast.

But it was not to be!

Keith's only message to her was his name in the list of those who perished in the ill-fated *Ariadne*, the ship that went down upon that stormy night, when Marion, standing on the lonely shore, watched and waited for she knew not what. That message was enough; she could work and wait until the hand of death should lead her to that land where "there shall be no more sea"—the brightest jewel of her life, a memory, nothing more!

STRANGE WATERS.

BY R. E. FRANCILLON,

AUTHOR OF "OLYMPIA," "PEARL AND EMERALD," &c. &c.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER V. EAGLES AND FLIES.

"ILMA," said Clari, on her return home, "when is the first performance of *Cleopatra*?"

"You have seen Prosper, Giulia?"

Clari went to the glass and took stock of herself deliberately. She knew perfectly well why Ilma had said, "You have seen Prosper." She looked flushed and brilliant, and at least ten years younger; Ilma had only been mistaken in thinking that her patroness had just returned from a battle instead of being on the eve of one.

"Yes; I have seen Prosper; but I did

not ask him about the Cleopatra, because I would not have believed him if he had told me. I would not believe if he told me the sun shone. No; not even if I saw it shine with my own eyes. No; I would not believe the sun if he agreed with Prosper. Ilma?"

"Giulia?"

"You do not love Miss Celia?"

"Fräulien March?"

"You hate her, then—there."

"Why should I hate her? I would as soon hate a cat—that's all."

"A cat? No; I don't think one would hate a cat very much, if it did not trouble one. But, if I did hate a cat, I would say so. I hate a great many things—bad coffee, and stupid people, and trouble, and lies, and Prosper, and—and people that hate nothing. But, never mind. You are quite right, Carina. It is good, yes, it is wise, not to hate people until one is quite sure they cannot harm one. It is not wise to hate one's enemies, Carina, no; nor to love one's friends. One never knows what is to be. When is the first night of Cleopatra? Well, Prosper had his faults; but he was not stupid—no."

"Do you mean you hate Fräulein March, Giulia?"

Clari lifted her shoulders with serene contempt—as the sun might had he shoulders, and were it suggested to him that he hated a farthing candle.

"I mean nothing at all, since you are so fond of her. Let us speak of other things. I will call on Lady Quorne."

Ilma was stupid, being cunning; but, for the same reason, she had the compensating insight which makes up for want of brains. At any rate it was clear that, whether she hated Celia for the sake of old times or no, she had been ordered to hate the rival of her patroness almost as clearly as Fitz-Urse and his fellows had been ordered to rid the king of the Archbishop of Canterbury—for a woman's hint to a woman need not to be so direct as a man's to a man. There was, at any rate, so much of the royal about Clari as to concentrate her power of hating upon what seemed to her the greatest and strongest, and to turn it into the likeness of magnanimity by leaving her no hate to spare for rivals and other natural enemies, whom she was thus compelled to deal with by deputy—whence the value of Prosper, who had always done all such dirty work for her without even letting her know that it

was done. It was for her, like a sovereign, to decree "Cleopatra shall fail!"—it was for meaner hands and narrower brains to save her the pains. *Aquila non captat muscas*—Eagles don't snap at flies. To crush Andrew Gordon and Cleopatra—high art and its arch-fiend together—was heroic enough to suit her sense of tragedy as well as her thirst for revenge; to ensure it by brushing out of the way such a fly as an English soprano was for meaner hands. Ilma thought, so far as nature had given her the power—not very far, but far enough for practical results, if not for the comprehension of reasons.

"Yes," she said with decision; "I do hate Fräulein March. I always did; from the very minute she came to Lindenheim."

"The very minute? Then he made love to her the very minute she came to Lindenheim?"

"No, Giulia; she made love to him. I mean—"

"Ah? But never mind; it is all the same who begins. I should like to know what it means to be in love, Ilma. It would be nice—for a change. But I suppose it would tire, like all other things. I thought it would be nice, once, to have diamonds in my ears. I don't care for them any more. I am tired of having things in my ears—especially *Casta Diva* and—" She went to the looking-glass again, and took out her earrings. "There! you shall have them, Ilma. And now I will go and call on Lady Quorne."

And so, without one word of plain English, French, or Italian, the fiasco of Celia, the only soprano on earth capable of singing Cleopatra, was discussed, settled, bargained, and, in part, paid for. Translated into any sort of word-language, Clari had said: "Miss Celia is in my way, and eagles may not stoop to flies—sparrows may. I am an eagle, you are a sparrow, Miss Celia is a fly. You are not so clever as Prosper; but jealousy, stimulated by diamonds, should make the stupidest woman out-do the cleverest man."

In one respect she wronged Ilma. That young lady was incapable of what Clari meant by hate—real hate is a passion, like real love, and almost as rare. Clari knew it, and judged others by her own tragic standard. But Ilma had what, for the purpose, did just as well—an old grudge and a long memory. The walk to Waaren

rankled still, and the sense of her own recent failure turned jealousy into envy. She took the diamonds, and was fired with the liveliest sense of favours to come. What could be more natural than that a prima donna should wish to ensure the immediate failure of a rival, whose years were fewer than her own? She, too, judged by her own standard; and perhaps the smaller nature, as often happens, understood the larger better than the larger comprehended the small. For while the little can have no greatneses, the great must needs have a thousand littlenesses.

So Ilma took the diamonds—the outward symbols of the broken bargain that Noemi Baruc had made with her arch-enemy. But it was not enough to take them; she must earn not only these, but more, and she must earn them well. It is all very well for a queen to say to her minister, Go and conquer my enemy. The minister should, to be of any use, be more than a penniless dependent, a foreign singer without a name, a mere drop in the sea of London without friends, or influence, or talents, or the means of buying them. But it is by instinct that genius knows its instruments, not by reason. Once more—if a woman, fired by envy, jealousy, disappointment, and diamonds, cannot, in such a case, dispense with all else, be she as poor as Job and as foreign as Clari in Saragossa Row, it must be that she has scruples; and from that disadvantage Mademoiselle Krasinska was absolutely free. It is even an advantage to be stupid, for brains make up in scruples for what they gain by skill.

It is likely enough that nobody on earth cared for the Gavestons—except the Gavestons. But then, much the same may be said of most people.

Somehow or other, as time went on, neither the influence nor the income of the curate of St. Anselm's expanded with his expanding needs. It is true that little Bessy was still alone in the nursery, but not likely that she would remain alone much longer. A connection with Hinchford did not seem to benefit the Swanns any more than a connection with the family of the auctioneer had been of service to its aristocratic member. The rarity of his visits to his cousin Alicia by no means satisfied his parishioners; indeed it would have been worldly-wise in him if he had

gained flavour for his sermons, as well as health for himself, by taking a walk in the Hinchford direction every Friday afternoon, putting up at The Five Adzes, and not returning till Saturday morning. Once, indeed, the countess called in her carriage upon Mrs. Gaveston, but she proved so utterly unlike the countess as described by the curate that the honour did him little good in the long run, especially among the stationers who dealt in photographs, and whose trade he had well-nigh spoiled. It is one thing to be a popular curate, when unmarried, to even one of fifteen young ladies who meet to hear one read Locksley Hall aloud; but it was doubtful now if the curate of St. Anselm's, had he been the finest reader alive, could have reckoned upon a larger audience than the two Bessies.

And changes were beginning to take place, even in Deepweald. Nobody had as yet even begun to hint that to pull down the cathedral and build it up again would be good for trade. But the oldest and most respected inhabitant of the city had died, and had been succeeded by an inhabitant even older and yet more respectable; a chimney had been on fire in College Court; and, altogether, the city had been by no means without its history. Among incidents of hardly less importance than these, the curate, at Bessy's wiser suggestion and with her help, had written straight to the earl and asked him if he could not do something for the countess's cousin. Nothing is too minute to be included in the chronicles of Deepweald, supposing it to be necessary that every city should have its chronicles. Reginald did not like the task, for he was a bad hand at letter-writing, and a still worse at begging; but Bessy had no such scruples, and honestly believed, even after nearly three years of marriage, that her husband was fit to be bishop of the diocese. The see was not vacant, but at any rate they might make him a dean, and even a good living, at a sufficient distance to give her rank as the rector's wife rather than the auctioneer's daughter, would be worth accepting as a step to better things.

It had been a great piece of business, writing that letter to Lord Quorne, and called for a separate discussion over almost every word. Reginald could write a sermon in half-an-hour at a pinch; but then it does not much matter how one spells sermons. Making a petition to a peer is

a different kind of matter altogether. But at last the letter was not only written but sent, to the curate's intense relief. Bessy watched every post, but he felt that he had done his duty by his family, and that nobody could henceforth complain if he let himself vegetate at St. Anselm's henceforth and for ever. He would always be able to say, "I have done my best; I have done all I can."

For many days Bessy's sanguine confidence in the effect of such a triumph of literary skill as that letter acted upon the postman, like watching upon a pot that is meant to boil. Her husband's eye was beginning to say to her, "There; I knew nothing would come." She began to give up saying, whenever the postman rang, "There! perhaps that is a letter from the earl." Presently she began to give up thinking it even, and was even beginning to imagine that it would never have been written if her advice had been followed.

The phonology of knockers is a science, but there is not much more character about rings than about the so-called Italian hand that ladies practised twenty years ago. The Gavestons—trifles must be made the most of in Deepweald—had only a bell. But nevertheless there was no mistaking for the postman's clatter the quick tinkle that might, and did, announce Miss Hayward—who was Miss Hayward still. Had she been otherwise, the chronicler of Deepweald would have no need to descend to trifles for lack of more remarkable matter.

Miss Hayward, though not popular, was always welcome. Her secret was, that wherever she went, she carried news. In ancient Athens she would have been simply invaluable.

"I'm so sorry Mr. Gaveston is not at home," she said, after disposing of the weather and little Bessy. "Something has happened which I'm not sure ought not to shock one; only of course one doesn't want to be shocked without being sure that one ought to be."

"Of course not!" said Bessy Gaveston. "I'm sure nobody wants to be shocked less than I do. What is it—nothing too dreadful?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. People think differently now about things than what they used to. I don't mean Mr. Gaveston, my dear."

"I should think not—I'm sure Reginald never thinks different; never. He doesn't

hold with any of the new ideas—he never even reads them."

"No. I don't object to a clergyman preaching in a surplice—not at all, though I ought to tell you, as a friend, that I know it for a fact that there are people in St. Anselm's that do. It does look high, to be sure; but then one can't possibly approve of what's low. After all, St. Anselm's isn't St. Botolph's, and it's proper to show that we can pay for our washing. What I object to is—you remember Celia March, Bessy?"

"Poor Celia March? Of course I do. What about her?"

"I always did—I never did approve of you and Mr. Gaveston making so much of that girl. Of course it wasn't for me to say anything at the time, for I never give my opinion till it's asked for; that's like locking the stable-door before the horse is stolen, you know, and that's a thing I never did, and, therefore, I never will. But I never did approve of those girls with eyes like saucers. There's always sure to be something behind; and when people aren't like their neighbours, they're pretty safe to be different from others—mark my words."

"Good gracious, Miss Hayward! What has she done?"

"Oh, nothing, my dear. It's nothing to me what people do. Only I thought, if you still correspond with her, that you, as a clergyman's wife, ought to do it with your eyes open, that's all. P'raps, if you weren't a clergyman's wife, and bound to keep yourself select, I wouldn't say a word now; for people do all sorts of things now that in my time they'd have been turned their backs on for, and never spoken to again. People mayn't mind preaching in surplices, for about that there's two opinions, and I can't say I disapprove; but when clergymen's wives associate with actresses and suchlike, why then—well, people will talk, my dear; and quite right too."

"Good gracious, Miss Hayward! Celia March turned actress? Why I'd as soon—it's too dreadful; it can't be. Oh, I am sorry. But, I assure you, I have lost sight of her for ever so long—I have indeed."

"I'm glad to hear it, I'm sure," said Miss Hayward, shortly. "I'm very glad indeed. I saw it in the papers. She's going to act in something called Cleopatra, who was a most improper person, as I happen to know; she's going to act in

London, in *The Times*. She drank vinegar, you know, and was killed by an aspic—but you know what I mean; it's all in *The Guide to Knowledge*, and——"

"A letter for master, ma'am," said the housemaid, bringing in a letter on a tray.

"Very well, Mary; put it down. Oh, I am so sorry!" said Bessy. "Poor Celia!"

"Poor, indeed!" said Miss Hayward. "But there's one comfort; one knows what they come to. If it wasn't for that, who'd be respectable, I should like to know? But I'm glad you don't know anything about her, Bessy, for yours and Mr. Gaveston's sake; very glad indeed. I thought you'd be sure to know all about it, or else I wouldn't have mentioned it, I'm sure." Miss Hayward wore no spectacles, and needed none; and her eyes were upon the letter which Mary had laid upon the table, address downwards. "And how," she asked, "by-the-way, is the Countess of Quorne?"

"Oh, very well, I believe. But I was thinking of Celia, poor girl."

"My dear, in such cases, pity is thrown away. I want to hear about the countess. Of course you often hear from her?"

"Well—no—that is—ah!" exclaimed Bessy, suddenly feeling her heart leap as she caught sight of a coronet and the letter "Q." "Yes—there is a letter from the earl—for Reginald. Oh dear—I wish——" and she examined the envelope as if the postmarks could tell her what was within.

"Pray don't mind me," said Miss Hayward politely.

"It is for Reginald—I must wait till he comes. I wonder—yes, I knew it was only a matter of time. Miss Hayward—I'm afraid—I hope—Reginald won't be curate of St. Anselm's very long."

"Indeed? That is news! I congratulate you, Bessy dear, with all my heart—I do, indeed! Where shall you go?"

"I don't know yet—I don't know what the earl has done. But I was sure he would do something—sure!"

"My dear, with such influence, Mr. Gaveston ought to be a bishop in time."

Bessy was doubly pleased that the letter had come at last, in such a manner that all Deepweald would hear of the coronet and the letter Q. Independently of the triumph of her sagacity, her aristocratic prestige was whitewashed in the city for at least

nine days to come; for ten days it would have been, had she been polite enough to treat the letter as a matter of course, and piqued her visitor's interest by saying nothing. But Bessy Gaveston was, after all, but a simple soul.

"And, indeed," Miss Hayward went on, "even now it may be to make him a colonial. They're making colonials everywhere—even among the Cannibals."

"Oh, Miss Hayward, surely——"

"I am told, my dear, on high authority, that there were few people who stand in greater need of improvement than the Cannibals. I have always been of opinion that to show a Cannibal the error of his ways should be a great satisfaction to a well-constituted mind like yours. And their climate is most delightful, I believe; and then colonials get plenty of holidays, and their anecdotes are most delightful."

Bessy's heart was beginning to fall again. She could not quite remember in what latitude and longitude, according to her geography-book, the Cannibals live, but she thought of Bessy the younger, and felt that even episcopal dignity might be bought too dear. She wished Reginald would come home.

"But, perhaps," went on Miss Hayward, "you will have work at home. Perhaps you will be thrown among drunkenness, and crime, and all sorts of shocking things. I have often thought that Mr. Gaveston's talents were thrown away on a quiet place like St. Anselm's. That's what I should like if I was a clergyman's wife, Bessy—to get a lot of tipsy men together and give them a good talking to. They'd be thankful to me, when I'd done. Ah—Mr. Gaveston—let me congratulate you!"

"Miss Hayward? I'm delighted, I'm sure," said Gaveston, who entered his own house without ringing. "Well, Bessy—anything happened? Ah—a letter from—yes, it's from my Cousin Alicia." He looked at Bessy, as if to gain courage from her humble grey eyes. "Well—anyway, here goes: Heads or—I should say, we'll see. 'DEAR MR. GAVESTON,—The pressing parliamentary duties'—he ran his eyes down the letter: Bessy watched his face eagerly, but gathered no more than from the postmarks. Miss Hayward also watched, with the interest which only reaches its climax when taken in the affairs of others. At last he handed the open letter to his wife with a sigh. "There, Bessy. Well,

Miss Hayward—and how goes the world with you?”

“I am to congratulate you I, trust, Mr. Gaveston?”

“Oh yes.” But he pulled his whisker so absently that Miss Hayward almost fancied he had said, “Oh no.”

Meanwhile Bessy read:

“DEAR MR. GAVESTON,—The pressing parliamentary duties of Lord Quorne have prevented his answering you earlier. We are quite delighted to hear that you and Mrs. Gaveston are well, and shall hope to have the pleasure of making her acquaintance ere long. Indeed it is for that reason that I write to you instead of Lord Quorne, as I want both you and Mrs. Gaveston to be of real service to me. As to your letter, Lord Quorne's church influence is long ago disposed of, and will not, in all likelihood, be open again for a long time. You may be sure that, whenever it is in his power, my husband will not forget my kinsman and old friend. Meanwhile, what I ask you is for me; and my request is addressed to Mrs. Gaveston as much as to you. A young lady, Miss Celia March, in whom I am deeply interested, is about to make her first appearance this season on the operatic stage. Indeed, if I am not mistaken, you met her last year at Hinchford; and you must have known her father, who was organist at Deepweald. I need not tell you that a girl like her, thrown suddenly into the midst of our profession!”—“Our profession!” wondered Bessy; but she read on—“into the midst of our profession requires to live respectably and does not find it easy. Her father is infirm—deaf, in fact—and she has no other relations. I want to find her a home among friends, for the season, where she will feel at home, and I absolutely don't know what to do with her. She cannot lodge alone; that would never do. Her father has a rooted objection to her holding the least communication with artists or professional people off the stage; and he is, as perhaps you may know, the most obstinate man whom I ever knew. On receiving your letter, it struck me that Mrs. Gaveston might not object to spend a season in town, with an old acquaintance for a companion. Will she? I hope she will. I suppose some one can take your Sunday duties—indeed,

I can find you a clergyman who will be only too happy, and it will be a great thing for Miss March. Indeed, I don't know what else to do. You will have to take lodgings in a good part of the town, where Miss March may have plenty of fresh air and yet be within easy reach of the theatre. You will also require to hire a brougham. My coachman will manage all that for you. Miss March is, for a day or two, staying with me. It will be best if you will arrange to come up on Monday, when you shall find lodgings ready for you. Of course you will be at no expense to yourself during your stay. Mrs. Gaveston will please to accept the enclosed, for immediate requirements, from her husband's old friend, kinswoman, and sincere well-wisher,
ALICIA QUORNE.”

Bessy turned red and pale. She glanced at Miss Haywood. To be the chaperon of an actress, after all? She looked at Reginald. To be in London for the season; to go to Quorne House; to keep a brougham; to spend, all at once, a cheque for a hundred pounds? Mrs. Swann's daughter's head turned and swam. The eyes of Reginald and Bessy met, and said, “Well?” and “Well?”

But there was only one answer. When Lady Quorne underscored “I hope,” it was for her poor relations to read “I command.”

“Well, Bessy,” said Miss Haywood, “I see you have things to talk about, so I won't stay tea to-day. I only came to tell you about Celia March; that's all.”

“I think—I think,” stammered Bessy, looking at her husband, “that—that, in fact— Is it so wrong, Reginald, to be on the stage?”

“It entirely depends upon circumstances,” said the curate, *ex cathedra*. “I can humbly conceive of circumstances which may make it wrong for a man to be a shoemaker; but one may be quite satisfied that if—if, in short, a lady like, say Lady Quorne, goes to a shoemaker for her shoes, that he is a good shoemaker; and a shoemaker is a man, and therefore a good shoemaker is a good man. And, by Butler's analogy, the same rule applies.”

“I'm very glad to hear it,” said Miss Haywood. “Very glad indeed.”

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